



COPING

WITH CHANGE:
a new mother's guide



women's
health clinic



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www.womenshealthclinic.org



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A BABY CHANGES YOUR LIFE

Whether you've given birth or adopted, a baby changes your life. For most new mothers, life with baby is different than they thought. Many things change:

Your feelings change

New mothers have many different feelings – happy, sad, unsure, anxious, angry, confused– sometimes all at once! These feelings grow stronger when we are tired.

Your body changes, inside and out

Body and hormone changes during and after pregnancy affect mood. Some women feel happy about their birth experience; most women need time to recover both physically and emotionally.

Your knowledge changes

Most new mothers feel unsure about caring for baby. Other people may tell you what they think you should be doing. Every baby is unique. You might have to try many different things to learn what works best for you and your baby. It helps to be patient with yourself and to practice!

Your daily life changes

You likely have lots of other things to do as well as caring for baby. You may not be able to do everything you want in a day. There are few breaks from mothering. Many mothers feel overwhelmed.



Mothering is Hard Work

It's okay to have mixed feelings about it. Be kind and gentle with yourself. You will learn new skills and grow more confident with time.

Mothering can be easier when you:

- Have support
- Have reasonable expectations for yourself and baby
- Take care of your own needs

POSTPARTUM EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENTS & REACTIONS

Postpartum Emotional Adjustments

Pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering change our bodies and our lives. New mothers go through common postpartum emotional adjustments to some degree: crying, being tired, feeling anxious, irritated, or angry; changes in sleep and appetite, feelings of guilt or doubt, or being overwhelmed. These are all normal in the early stages of mothering.

“I didn’t know it would be like this.”

Ideas and images about birth and mothering are often different than how things really are. It helps to talk to other mothers and share different things to try, what worked and didn’t work for each of you.

TRY Connect with other mothers in support groups online or in your community.



“I feel overwhelmed.”

Don’t make too many demands on yourself in one day. If you are able to look after yourself and baby, you have done enough!

TRY Share your feelings with people close to you. All new mothers need help. It’s okay to ask for help when you need it.

“I’m so tired!”

Resting our bodies and our brains is important for good physical and mental health. Accept that baby will be up at night and that you won’t get as much sleep as you want or need.

TRY Rest when baby sleeps. Practice deep breathing and other things to relax. Take short breaks from activity throughout the day to renew your energy.

Feeling unsure is normal for new mothers. The physical signs of anxiety – pounding heart, sweating, upset stomach – can make us feel even more anxious and unsure.

TRY Slow down. Take a few deep breaths. Simplify your daily routine to reduce stress.

“I’m anxious about everything.”

“I don’t want to be touched.”

Being tired, the demands of infant feeding, body changes, and fear of pain or getting pregnant are just some reasons why new mothers don’t want to be touched. This is a time to get support and understanding in your personal relationships.

TRY Talk about how you feel and the kind of physical closeness you need right now. You need time for your body to heal and to adjust to your mothering role.

“I get upset when my baby won’t stop crying.”

Babies cry to let us know they need our attention.

They might be hungry, wet, tired, uncomfortable, or over-stimulated.

TRY Soothe your baby with gentle touch, movement, or sound. If you have tried everything and baby keeps crying, put baby in a safe place. It’s ok for babies to cry a bit. Leave the room and take some slow deep breaths to relax.



You might feel angry with yourself, others, or your baby. You may be angry about how your life has changed and miss the way things used to be. Accepting our feelings helps us deal with them in ways that are safe for ourselves and others. It also helps to remember that our feelings are always changing. The way you feel right now will pass.

TRY Show your feelings through writing, drawing, physical movement, or talk to someone you trust.

"I'm so angry!"





***“Sometimes
I have scary
thoughts.”***

Some new mothers have fleeting thoughts or images of harming baby. While these thoughts can be scary and make us anxious, they are normal for this stage of mothering. It might help to know that mothers very rarely act on these thoughts.

TRY Place baby in a safe place and take slow, deep breaths to get calm. If that doesn't work, make sure baby is safe and get help.

**Note: See Page 17 for a list of emergency numbers.*

Postpartum Emotional Reactions

Postpartum emotional reactions are common; up to 13% of new mothers will have them. Often called postpartum depression, these emotional reactions are when the usual postpartum emotional adjustments get worse. There is no single cause or single treatment for a postpartum emotional reaction.

Important: If your feelings stop you from doing your daily activities, talk to your healthcare provider.

Postpartum Psychosis

This is a rare disorder that affects 1-2 women in every 1000 births. It often occurs early after birth. Signs and symptoms should not be ignored at any time.

When this happens, the mother will not be aware of her behaviour. Family and friends will be more likely to notice if she seems to be:

- losing connection with reality
- hallucinating
- speaking unclearly
- extremely depressed
- feeling sped up (manic)
- going without sleep for long periods of time

Important: This condition needs immediate medical attention.

If you take medication:

Learn more about any product – prescription drugs, over-the-counter treatments, natural or herbal remedies – you take for postpartum emotional reactions.

Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist:

- What does this product do?
- When will it start working?
- How will I know it's working?
- How long do I have to take it?
- What are the side effects?
- What happens if I get pregnant while using it?
- What other products or foods should I avoid?
- How does it affect breast milk?

Important: Let your healthcare provider know if you are using other prescription drugs, any over-the-counter treatments, herbal or natural remedies, and alcohol or street drugs. Let them know immediately if you have a reaction or side effects.

To learn more about taking medication in pregnancy or while breastfeeding, contact Motherisk (Toronto Hospital) toll-free at 1-877-439-2744 or see their website: www.motherisk.org

NURSE YOURSELF

The NURSE method can prompt you to take care of yourself.

- N = nourishment**
- U = understanding**
- R = rest & relaxation**
- S = self**
- E = energy**

(Adapted from Women's Moods: What Every Woman Must Know About Hormones, the Brain, and Emotional Health by Deborah Sichel & Jeanne Watson Driscoll, 1999)

Nourishment

Mothers are often expected to take care of other's needs before their own. When we feel overwhelmed, depressed or anxious, we can ignore our need for food.

It helps to:

Eat regularly.

Set times for snacks or light meals to fuel your body during the day.

Make eating easy.

Eating is more important than cooking. Get easy-to prepare nutritious foods. Ask others to make meals you can re-heat or have as a snack later.

Make extra food.

When you cook, make extra servings for meals for another time.

Choose healthy foods.

Have nutritious foods and snacks available. Avoid sugar – it can cause mood swings.

Avoid dieting.

Women feel pressure to be thin, no matter what our natural body size and shape. People can be healthy at all body sizes.

Try to eat from all food groups to get the nutrients and energy your body needs.

Understanding

Accept that moods are always changing. That helps us be gentle with ourselves when our feelings are intense. We are surrounded by media images of mothers who always seem happy and content but this isn't how it always is for most of us. Being unhappy, frustrated, or angry at times doesn't mean we don't love our children or want to care for them.

It helps to:

Listen to your body.

Our feelings tell us how we are doing. When we ignore these signals, bodies find other ways – like illness – to get our attention.

Accept your feelings.

All emotions are ok. Try to accept your feelings without judging or pushing them away. Practice different ways to express intense emotions safely.

Shape your thoughts.

Think and do things that make you positive and hopeful. Focusing on negative events or feelings makes us feel worse, not better.



Rest & relaxation

Getting enough rest and knowing how to relax are important for physical and mental health. A baby in the house can sometimes make that seem impossible! Learning how to relax and rest is important when sleep is interrupted.

It helps to:

Take time to rest and relax.

Resting is more important for your health than doing chores.

Acknowledge what you've done.

If you have cared for yourself and your child in a day, then you have done well!

Reduce stress.

Do the things you did to relax before baby arrived. Try deep breathing, listening to music, reading, walking – anything that makes you feel calm and relaxed.

Self

Mothers often don't have time to do all the things they did before baby arrived. Everyone needs time alone to restore energy and enthusiasm for life.

It helps to:

Do things you enjoy that make you feel good about yourself.

Explore new ideas and activities.

Time alone, being in nature, writing, music, arts, crafts and social activities are just some of the many ways we can care for ourselves.

Have hope.

Know you're not alone in the way you feel right now. Trust that things will change for the better with time.

Accept change.

A baby changes everything about our lives. Give yourself time to adjust.

Energy

Building energy improves our mental and physical well-being. Physical activity:

- improves mood
- reduces stress
- builds energy we can use for other things

It helps to:

Look for ways to be active in your everyday life.

Walking or dancing with baby and doing chores are ways to be active without spending a lot of money.

WOMEN'S HEALTH CLINIC MOTHERS PROGRAM

The Mothers Program offers a range of community-based services in Winnipeg to support women through the changes mothering brings.

For more information on the following mothering support services, please call the Mothers Program assistant at **204-947-2422 ext. 113**.

Please see our website for a list of current workshops, support groups, and resources: **www.womenshealthclinic.org**

Families Connecting Support Groups

A Healthy Baby Community Support Program that assists pregnant women and parents of children under age 1 to connect with other parents, families, and health professionals. For information on these and on other Healthy Baby Groups, please go to www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/healthybaby

Coping with Change

Workshops for Parents

Women's Health Clinic offers Coping with Change workshops to help you understand the everyday changes – including emotional adjustments – that happen when a baby enters your life.

Trained Facilitators deliver Coping With Change Workshops

Trained by Women's Health Clinic, facilitators from other organizations offer Coping with Change sessions within their organization or community.

GETTING HELP

Finding support in your community can help you deal with the stress in your life and the demands of mothering.

Ask someone nearby that you trust for help. The Postpartum Depression Association of MB also has a detailed listing of provincial resources: www.ppdmanitoba.ca. **If you are very worried about yourself or your baby, go to the nearest hospital emergency department.** Take your Manitoba Health card and other important information with you.

If you need immediate help, call:

Klinic Crisis Line	204-786-8686
Toll-free (outside Winnipeg)	1-888-322-3019
TTY	204-784-4097
WRHA Mobile Crisis Unit	204-940-1781

If you are being hurt in a relationship:

Call:

Province-wide Crisis Line 1-877-977-0007
(toll-free outside Winnipeg)

Online:

www.gov.mb.ca/fs/fvpp/index.html

If you have questions or concerns:

Call a Public Health Nurse

Go to: www.gov.mb.ca/health/rha/contact.html for contacts in your local Regional Health Authority, or call your local hospital for the number of the community health office in your area.

Call Health Links

Health Links is a 24-hour phone line with nurses trained to answer a range of health questions.

In Winnipeg:	204-788-8200
Toll-free outside Winnipeg:	1-888-315-9257

Call your family doctor, midwife, or baby’s doctor.

Visit Women’s Health Clinic online.

We have a current list of community resources in print and online on our website: www.womenshealthclinic.org

For breastfeeding questions or concerns:

Call:

Breastfeeding Hotline	204-788-8667
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Women’s Hospital Breastfeeding support	204-787-1166
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Online:

LaLeche League of Manitoba website	www.lllc.ca
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Motherisk (Toronto Hospital) website	www.motherisk.org
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Mothering is hard work.

You can help make it easier. Your gift helps us provide Coping with Change support groups and update this booklet with the most current research. Donate now to help a new mother in Winnipeg today. Thank you.

Le rôle de mère est exigeant.

Vous pouvez contribuer à rendre cette tâche plus facile. Votre don nous aide à former des groupes de soutien « Vivre avec le changement » et à mettre à jour la présente brochure en fonction des toutes dernières recherches. Faites un don dès maintenant pour aider une nouvelle mère, à Winnipeg. Merci.



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